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GERMAN PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS.¹

THE spirit in which these three lectures are written is well indicated in what, at the end, Professor Dewey tells us is the instinctive ideal of American policy: "Promoting the efficacy of human intercourse irrespective of class, racial, geographical and national limits." It is a fair, candid, and generous presentation of the political philosophy of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, yet independent in its attitude and not, on the whole, favorable in its judgment. We are shown that Kant, in divorcing Duty from the natural motives and consequences of action, and leaving particular duties indeterminate, virtually lent absolute authority to whatever commandments tradition or public law might impose; his morality, for all its theoretical autonomy, was servile in practise. "History proves what a dangerous thing it has been for men, when they try to impose their will upon other men, to think of themselves as special instruments and organs of Deity. The danger is equally great when an *a priori* Reason is substituted for a Divine Providence" (p. 43). "A justice which, irrespective of the determination of social well-being, proclaims itself an irresistible spiritual impulsion possessed of the force of a primitive passion, is nothing but a primitive passion clothed with a spiritual title so that it is protected from having to render an account of itself" (p. 56).

We are shown also how incredibly Fichte exalted the mission of the German people, leaving nothing to be added by the most vehement Pan-Germanism of to-day. The German nation was the only heir to the whole past, and the only seed of a healthy humanity in the future, so that if this special nationality was submerged, all history would perish with it, nay, God himself, who existed only when incarnate in mankind, would disappear. "As the Germans are the only truly religious people, they alone are truly capable of patriotism. Other peoples are products of external causes; they have no self-formed self. . . . The Germans alone of all existing

¹ "German Philosophy and Politics." John Dewey. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 1915. Pp. 132.

European nations are a pure race. They alone have preserved unalloyed the original divine deposit. Language is the expression of the national soul. And only the Germans have kept their native speech in its purity" (p. 100). "Since the State is an organ of divinity, patriotism is religion" (p. 99). "The premisses of the historic syllogism are plain. First, the German Luther who saved for mankind the principle of spiritual freedom against Latin externalism; then Kant and Fichte, who wrought out the principle into a final philosophy of science, morals, and the State; as a conclusion, the German nation organized in order to win the world to recognition of the principle, and thereby to establish the rule of freedom and science in humanity as a whole. . . . In the grosser sense of the words, Germany has not held that might makes right. But it has been instructed by a long line of philosophers that it is the business of ideal right to gather might to itself in order that it may cease to be merely ideal. The State represents exactly this incarnation of ideal law and right in effective might As past history is the record of the gradual realization in the Germanic State of the divine idea, future history must uphold and expand what has been accomplished. Diplomacy is the veiled display of law clothed with force in behalf of this realization, and war is its overt manifestation. That war demands self-sacrifice is but the more convincing proof of its profound morality. It is the final seal of devotion to the extension of the kingdom of the Absolute on earth" (pp. 87-89).

It was Hegel who formally transferred these divine attributes to the established State, Fichte having looked for them rather in the inner inspiration of the nation and its "true priest," the scholar. Hegel's scorn was infinite for any ideal not destined to be actualized and dominant. In his own words, quoted by Professor Dewey, "'the State is the rational in itself and for itself. Its substantial unity is an absolute end in itself. To it belongs supreme right in respect to individuals whose first duty is—just to be members of the State.' The State 'is the absolute reality, and the individual himself has objective existence, truth, and morality only in his capacity as a member of the State.' . . . The State is God on earth" (pp. 110-111). If great "world-heroes" venture to throw off established ideas or institutions, it is not on their own authority, but only because they draw, in Hegel's words, "their purposes and calling . . . from a concealed fount, from that inner spirit hidden beneath the surface which, striking the outer world as a shell, bursts it to pieces. . . . Such men may even treat other great and sacred interests inconsiderately. . . . So mighty a force must trample down many an innocent flower—crush to pieces many an object in its path" (pp. 111-112). Or, as Professor Dewey himself puts it, "history is the

movement, the march of God on earth through time. Only one nation at a time can be the latest and hence the fullest realization of God. . . . War is the signally visible occurrence of such a flight of the divine spirit in its onward movement. The idea that friendly intercourse among all the peoples of the earth is a legitimate aim of human effort is a basic contradiction to such a philosophy. War is explicit realization of 'dialectic,' of the negation by which the higher synthesis of reason is assured. It effectively displays the 'irony of the divine Idea.' . . . Particularly against the right of the 'present bearer of the world-spirit, the spirits of other nations are absolutely without right. The latter, just like the nations whose epochs have passed, count no longer in universal history.'"

This should prove a calming thought at the present time; for if Germany, as can hardly be doubted, is the "present bearer of the world-spirit," Belgium, Poland, and the United States are as safe from suffering the least wrong at German hands as is ancient Ninevah or Carthage. And as the author observes, "when a recent German writer argues that for Germany to surrender any territory which it has conquered during the present war would be sacrilegious, since it would be to refuse to acknowledge the workings of God in human history, he speaks quite in the Hegelian vein" (pp. 112-113).

How much more solid and reassuring is this healthy optimism than the old fanciful hope of the martyrs that they should be vindicated at the last day! The veritable last judgment, Hegel teaches us, is the course of history. To apportion justice the God of Hegel does not need to trouble his pure German conscience with Jesuitical casuistry or an impossible hedonistic calculus. His principle is as simple as it is rational: Never to vindicate the victim, always to vindicate the executioner. These genuine maxims of idealism, presented by Professor Dewey, as I have not here the space to do, in their original atmosphere and perspective, ought to dispose once for all of the stammerings of those English Hegelians who would persuade us that Germany has now proved false to the spirit of her great philosophers.

It was from Spinoza, I imagine, that Hegel caught this scorn of the finite, of the vainly desired, of the under dog. But in Spinoza this scorn had been purely naturalistic and contemplative: he saw the laws of nature, like a tempest, continually sweeping the old world clean and continually renewing it. This precarious and incidental hold on existence Spinoza attributed also to himself and to all mankind, even if the spectacle of that cruel and fertile necessity could at times fascinate the mind and lift its rapt sympathies above its own destiny. The sublimity and the irony of this pantheistic

sentiment are fully preserved in Hegel. Yet in him the transcendental theory of knowledge had intervened. Scorn of the finite could no longer be, as in Spinoza, impartial, courteous, and Oriental: sympathy with the infinite could no longer be liberating and humble. The self that was finite, and that perished, now passed for a mere figment of thought: the true and living self had killed it by thinking, being itself at once agitated and immortal. Humility was thus impossible; so was peace, so was the understanding that judges not. Hegel's scorn of the finite involved recasting it and explaining to it what it really was; this scorn was acrid, arrogant, eager, hounded by the lust of life, and swollen with the claim to victory. It was comparative, it lived by transition, and it was not pure scorn, but was mixed with annoyance. The thought that all that was real was rational did not reconcile Hegel to the world and separate him from it in the same even and thorough way in which Spinoza was reconciled and separated by the thought that all that was real was necessary. "Real" for Hegel, as for Plato, was a eulogistic term. The unreal existed also. The real had to swallow the unreal and digest it, so that this reality, this reason, was always hungry and sometimes dyspeptic. The rational idea was an outline, and the filling might be deficient or might be unsuitable. The concrete universal was the system or organic scheme of some whole, lending the parts their significance and "reality," but it was not identical with their total material being, with all their accidents. The rational was not coextensive with the real, in the ordinary sense of this word: it was identical only with the "truly" real, with that which is conceptual, deducible, and dialectical in what exists or is found. This real was therefore not improperly called ideal as well.

When Hegel sanctifies whatever is real and dominant, scorning all defeated demands, he therefore still preserves a distinction between the ideal and the fact. The State is divine, but any State on occasion may be false to itself and not properly the State. The individual and the foreigner have no rights of their own, but the State, to express its nature fully, must grant them some privileges. Hegel is a realist in ethics, a sort of speculative Bismarck; but he is idealistic enough to remain a moralist, since his reading of facts and forces distinguishes what is "real" and dynamic in them, which is good, from what is merely phenomenal, which is worthless. The tone of eulogy or disparagement which permeates his writing, though often willful and out of place, is thus not an absolute betrayal of his pantheism, as it would have been of Spinoza's. Hegel's world, while as a whole it perfectly fulfils its mission, in every part only strives to fulfil it, and even the total fulfilment exists only in the act of achieving it, in which aim and fact are still distinguishable. The

best of possible processes, he thinks, should be better at one end than at the other, though not, like most books, music, and systems of philosophy, better at the beginning than at the end. His romantic theology oscillates between two moral standards, neither of which it can abandon without giving up the ghost: the standard of the struggling will, which aches to emerge from one intolerable situation after another and therefore always conceives the future as better than the present, and the standard of the supposed divine judgment, which regards that endless agony as equally good and necessary throughout. The romantic principle, frankly expressed, would justify Schopenhauer and Nietzsche; the theological principle, if held with conviction, would lead back to the genuine pantheism of Spinoza and the Stoics.

Professor Dewey skillfully avoids complicating his survey with any account of the transcendental theory of knowledge; yet that after all is the foundation of everything in this philosophy, and until it is radically abandoned we shall hardly emerge from the moral quicksands to which it leads. Why is there in fact a clear difference between what is and what ought to be? Why is true freedom so very unlike the blessed consciousness of being willingly a slave? Why is the autonomy of conscience actually not romantic and anarchical? Why is there a limited authority in institutions? Why are compromise and partial cooperation practicable in society? Why is there sometimes a right to revolution? Why is there sometimes a duty of loyalty? Because the whole transcendental philosophy, if made ultimate, is false, and nothing but a selfish perspective hypostasized; because the will is absolute neither in the individual nor in humanity; because nature is not a product of the mind, but on the contrary there is an external world, ages prior to any *a priori* idea of it, which the mind recognizes and feeds upon: because there is a steady human nature within us, which our moods and passions may wrong, but can not annul; because there is no absolute imperative, but only the operation of instincts and interests more or less subject to discipline and mutual adjustment; and finally because life is a compromise, an incipient loose harmony between the passions of the soul and the forces of nature, forces which likewise generate and protect the souls of other creatures, endowing them with powers of expression and self-assertion comparable to our own and with aims not less sweet and worthy in their own eyes; so that the quick and honest mind can not but practise courtesy in the universe, exercising its will without vehemence or forced assurance, judging with serenity, and in everything discarding the word absolute as the most false and the most odious of words.

GEORGE SANTAYANA.